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Quality, Culture and Charism

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Quality schooling is a much-discussed yet problematic and somewhat nebulous issue. While it is usually agreed that "quality"—as something to be valued, approved of, sought after and promoted in education—can be recognised when it exists, definitions and analyses of "quality" are more contentious.[1] However quality is defined or analysed it is certainly a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. It spans the realms of philosophy, politics, ethics, economics, ideology and sociology to name but a few.

Despite the problematic nature of discussion and debate about quality, it is always, in practical terms, a discussion about the search for values upon which education and schooling is built and which are to be pursued as goals worthy of striving towards. Aspin and Chapman suggest that democracy, humanization, independence, interpersonal relationships and cultural enrichment should be included amongst the agreed core values of quality schooling.[2] While admitting that this list is neither comprehensive nor exhaustive, they do propose that there is wide and generally uncontested acceptance of these as a basic minimum.

The purpose of this essay is to explore this conception of core values and the manner in which they contribute towards the quality of the ethos or culture of Catholic education in general and Salesian education in particular. The culture, ethos, tone or atmosphere of an educational setting is one of a number of "sites of quality" identified by Aspin and Chapman.[3] Others include the characteristic features of the graduates (results or outcomes), the teaching and learning processes and activities employed (curriculum), the range, type, excellence and appropriateness of the human and material resources and facilities, and the leadership, administration and organization of the school. In this essay I choose to investigate the notion of school culture and ethos because it is the one least explored by Aspin and Chapman and one in which I have a keen interest—especially as it refers to schools conducted by the Roman Catholic religious community known as the Salesians of Don Bosco.

A significant American study[4] recently confirmed the overall quality of Catholic schools in the United States. Their research combined fieldwork in a selection Catholic schools with extensive analysis of national data and an exploration of the social and intellectual history of these institutions. They concluded that Catholic high schools manage to simultaneously achieve relatively

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[1] Cf. David N. Aspin, and Judith D. Chapman, with Vernon R. Wilkinson, *Quality Schooling: A Pragmatic Approach to Some Current Problems, Topics and Issues* (London: Cassell, 1994), 1, 35.

[2] Cf. Aspin and Chapman, 35ff.

[3] Cf. Aspin and Chapman, 199-200.

[4] Anthony S. Bryk, Valerie E. Lee, and Peter B. Holland, *Catholic Schools and the Common Good* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

high levels of student learning, distribute this learning more equitably with regard to race and class than the public sector, and sustain high levels of teacher commitment and student engagement.[5] These findings corroborate the long term findings of Australian researcher, Marcellin Flynn (1975, 1985, 1993).

Marcellin Flynn, in his 1985 study *The Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, concluded that "Catholic schools were having an effect on their students which was independent of their home background."[6] This conclusion was the result of a three year research project that involved 2,041 Year 12 students, 1,377 parents and 717 staff members in 25 randomly selected Catholic secondary schools in New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory. While the home (rather than the school) was found to have strongest unique effect on the religious practice of students and their development of moral values, Catholic schools were effective in terms of students' academic achievement, nurturing of personal faith, development of positive attitudes towards Church and the development of justice related values.[7]

The most surprising and unexpected finding of this study was the impact of school culture on academic performance. The climate or ethos of the school accounted for 73.40% of the explained variance accounted for in students' H.S.C. results.

> The extra-ordinarily strong unique predictive power of the informal curriculum of the school—its climate and ethos—was totally unexpected. It was confidently expected by the writer that the formal school curriculum—involving teaching, study of different H.S.C. subjects, teacher-student interaction—would have been the principal influence on academic achievement. It was also confidently expected that the home would have had a marked unique effect on H.S.C. achievement.[8]

It is interesting to note that while the school ethos accounted for 73.40% of the explained variance, the home accounted for 7.02% and the formal curriculum accounted for 9.63%. Thus, the impact of school culture upon academic achievement is extraordinary. It was known from previous studies by Leavey[9] and Flynn[10] that school climate had an influence on the religious development of students. However, the conclusion that "some schools develop a climate or

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[5] Cf. Bryk, Lee and Holland, 297.

[6] Marcellin Flynn, *The Effectiveness of Catholic Schools* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1985), 351.

[7] Cf. Flynn, *Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, 344-354.

[8] Flynn, *Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, 316.

[9] Margaret Carmel Leavey, "Religious Education, School Climate and Achievement: A Study of Nine Catholic Sixth Form Girls' Schools" (Ph.D. diss., Australian National University, 1972).

[10] Marcellin Flynn, *Some Catholic Schools in Action* (Sydney: Catholic Education Office, 1975).

ethos of achievement in which all students, even those of relatively ordinary natural ability, do better academically"[11] was one of the major findings of the study.

In exploring the effect of the "informal curriculum" Flynn took into account a number of factors including: the hidden curriculum, the organizational climate, the out-of-school curriculum, the social climate or ethos and the quality of school life, with particular attention given to the last two.[12] Here Flynn is acknowledging the complex nature of any understanding of school culture and this insight is further developed as each of these areas is further explored and considered in more detail. Amongst the factors that he considers important in any analysis of school culture are student and staff morale, attitudes towards discipline, pastoral care, the quality of school life, the extent of alienation and the nature and quality of interpersonal relationships.

In summarising, Flynn remarks:

> One of the most distinctive features of an effective Catholic school is its outstanding social climate which gives it a special ethos or spirit. This climate has a religious as well as an educational character and is generated in an intensely relational environment in which persons are respected and ultimate questions such as life, love, death, faith and God are confronted.[13]

Flynn's study is important for the major conclusion that it reaches with respect to the relationship between school culture and academic achievement. However, it is obvious that this conclusion needs to be studied in greater depth and that much of the terminology requires refinement and clarification. Terms such as "ethos", "spirit" and "climate" are used almost interchangeably and with little explanation.

Climate or Culture

Flynn takes up this challenge in his 1993 study *The Culture of Catholic Schools*, which, as its title suggests, focuses more specifically on the meaning of, influences upon and implications of the culture of Catholic schools.

However, before Flynn's study is considered in detail it is worth examining how other writers have dealt with issues associated with school culture, understandings of which can be as nebulous as "quality".

Research on school culture has drawn much from the experience of large corporate businesses. For example, Terrence E. Deal and Allan A. Kennedy, writing in 1982 and 1983,[14] directly apply their corporate understanding of cul-

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[11] Flynn, *Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, 351.

[12] Cf. Flynn, *Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, 165.

[13] Flynn, *Effectiveness of Catholic Schools*, 342.

[14] Terrence E. Deal, and Allan A. Kennedy, *Corporate Cultures: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1982); Terrence E.

ture as "the way things are done around here" to the educational setting. It is interesting to note the similarities in the language used.

Business	Education
Values are the bedrock of any corporate culture. As the essence of a company's philosophy of achieving success, values provide a sense of common direction for all employees and guidelines for their day-to-day behavior. These formulas for success determine (and occasionally arise from) the types of corporate heroes, and the myths, rituals and ceremonies of the culture. In fact, we think that often companies can identify, embrace and act on the values of the organization.	The elements of culture are shared values and beliefs, heroes and heroines, rituals and ceremonies, and an informal network of priests and priestesses, storytellers, spies and gossips.

Carolyn Anderson acknowledges that school climate research has its origins in research on business climate but contends that, "despite this relationship, school climate research can be distinguished as a separate area of inquiry."[15] She likewise creatively recognizes the imprecise nature of the language used to try to grasp and convey understandings of school climate and the ambiguity and complexity of the phenomenon which is being described:

> The field of school climate research in many ways is reminiscent of the seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant based on the one part each could touch, and who each claimed to possess the definitive image of an elephant.[16]

Maxwell and Thomas prefer (like Finlayson and Bates to whom they refer) the term "culture" rather than "climate". Indeed, they suggest that "climate" could be an unsuitable and devious metaphor[17] because it has served to emphasize the paradigm of control in schools[18] and because it presents an all-pervasive and static view of school life.[19] "Culture", however, is more dynamic and is related to such things as beliefs, values, norms and standards and patterns of behavior. Furthermore, they suggest that the attention given to "school culture" follows

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Deal, and Allan A. Kennedy, "Culture and School Performance," *Educational Leadership* 40.5 (February 1983): 14–15.

[15] Carolyn S. Anderson, "The Search for School Climate: A Review of the Research," *Review of Educational Research* 52.3 (September 1982): 368.

[16] Anderson, "The Search for School Climate," 376.

[17] Cf. T. W. Maxwell, and A. R. Thomas, "Social Climate and Social Culture," *Journal of Educational Administration* 29.2 (April-June 1991): 73.

[18] Cf. Maxwell and Thomas, 72-73.

[19] Cf. Maxwell and Thomas, 74.

the lead of writers in the field of business management[20]—again there is a clear relationship between business and education.

While some writers are concerned about technical considerations, others are more interested in phenomenological descriptions. For instance, Buetow remarks that the proponents of Catholic schools point to the unique atmosphere but find it difficult to define.[21] He suggests that the atmosphere of all schooling comprises all those circumstances which may not be the essence of education, but which are integral to it, or important to it, or both. It constitutes the medium, the external and internal environments, the conditions which in some measure circumscribe and determine, at a particular time and place, the kind of schooling provided.[22]

Buetow distinguishes between the external atmosphere and the internal atmosphere. The external atmosphere is constituted by those conditions which come from society as they are worked out within the economic, social, cultural and political structures of society at the family, local, national and international levels. Values play an important role, especially social values towards education, social values in general and social understandings of the goals of education. In the case of Catholic schools it also includes the Church's attitudes towards education, the priorities that the Church sets and what it looks for from its graduates.[23]

The internal atmosphere is that which is within the school: funding, resources, materials, staff training, support staffing. "The internal atmosphere of the Catholic school adds the most important element of the spiritual."[24] The internal atmosphere includes the atmosphere which permeates the school and which contributes to the building up of faith and the formation of Christian community.

> A Christian atmosphere and tone within the school has a profound formative influence on the development of faith. In a real sense, the tone is the message. As a complement of the home, the school environment is... a preparation for the school's formal program of education in faith... Pope Pius XI referred to it in his 1929 encyclical, *The Christian Education of Youth*: "it is of utmost importance to see... that the combination of circumstances which we call environment, correspond exactly to the end proposed."[25]

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[20] Cf. Maxwell and Thomas, 75.

[21] Cf. Harold A. Buetow, *The Catholic School: Its Roots, Identity and Future* (New York: Crossroads, 1988), 213.

[22] Cf. Buetow, 213.

[23] Cf. Buetow, 213-214.

[24] Buetow, 213.

[25] Buetow, 288, citing the encyclical, "The Christian Education of Youth," by Pope Pius XI, according to the translation found in *Seven Great Encyclicals* (Glen Rock, NJ: Paulist Press, 1963).

The internal atmosphere encompasses both the physical atmosphere and the spiritual atmosphere. The physical atmosphere is determined by the physical facilities, teaching and learning resources, support services, the hiring of appropriate staff, appropriate maintenance, etc.[26] Buetow considers the maintenance of records for such purposes as self-examination and history and the display of religious ornaments including crucifixes and images of saints to be very important aspects of the internal atmosphere.[27]

Buetow's comments may not exemplify a clearly defined understanding of what he refers to as "atmosphere", but his work is significant here in that it highlights a number of interactive dimensions that contribute to a greater whole. Furthermore, he identifies particular aspects that, in more technical formulations of "culture", are considered integral components. For instance, he identifies the importance of historical records. These document the on-going and unfolding story of the school, its traditions and way of life and contribute to the ever-evolving process of myth-making. The display of religious artifacts is one of the means by which expressive symbols are able to play an active part in the development and maintenance of school culture.

Buetow also identifies the importance of the religious and spiritual dimension of the culture of the Catholic school. Indeed, John Paul II considers this aspect vital to essence of Catholic schools as they should be known for the "witness of their ardent faith, and for the climate of respect, mutual aid, and evangelical joy permeating the whole establishment."[28]

Implicit within Buetow's understanding of "atmosphere" are such realities as beliefs, values, symbols, traditions, myths, rituals, stories and ways of life. These are amongst some of the elements that are usually included in more formalized expositions of "culture". An example of this is Ross Millikan's conceptual framework for school culture.[29]

Intangible and Tangible Aspects of School Culture

Like most writers in the field of "school culture", Millikan is aware that the concept is complex and ambiguous.[30] However, he believes that uniqueness is a virtue that should be fostered and rejects a purely positivistic approach to organizational theory. Instead, he seeks to "incorporate those elements which are conceptually-based, non-quantifiable, and values-laden, with those which are quantifiable and/or are empirically verifiable."[31] Culture, according to Mil-

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[26] Cf. Buetow, 222-223.

[27] Cf. Buetow, 386, note 48.

[28] Pope John Paul II, "Address to the International Association of Catholic Educators on the Occasion of the Twentieth Anniversary of Vatican II's Declaration on Christian Education" (28 October 1985).

[29] See: Ross H. Millikan, "School Culture: A Conceptual Framework." *Educational Administration Review* 5.2 (March 1987): 38–56.

[30] Cf. Millikan, 42.

[31] Millikan, 39.

likan, comprises both intangible and symbolic elements as well as those which are more susceptible to tangible expression. This view of culture revolves around people, human interactions, relationships, values and individual and collective needs.[32]

Drawing upon anthropological/sociological and aesthetic/artistic/literati understandings of culture, Millikan identifies the "interpersonal sharing of special experiences and values" as a central feature of "culture."[33] With these underpinnings in place, he proposes a conceptual framework for understanding "school culture" which incorporates both intangible and tangible elements. He suggests two basic categories of characteristics which are components of school culture: firstly, those which are conceptual and intangible in character and comprise values, philosophy and ideology; and secondly, those capable of more tangible expression. This latter category can be further sub-classified into:

1. conceptualized/verbalized expressions;
2. visual material expressions and symbolism; and
3. enacted/written behavioral expression.

According to Millikan's model the intangible conceptual base provides the particular individual and collective values, philosophy and ideology for the school. These, in turn, are given more tangible expression through words and language, stories, material objects, symbols and patterns of behavior.

> It is through these [tangible expressions] that we bring a measure of focus and commitment to our culture. It is by this process that we attempt to translate theory into practice, or at least attempt to bring some greater degree of correspondence between the espoused and the actual.[34]

Some examples of these tangible expressions of culture are outlined in the figure below.

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[32] Cf. Millikan, 39.
[33] Cf. Millikan, 42.
[34] Millikan, 45.

Conceptualized / verbalized	Visual / material symbolism	Enacted / behavioral expression
• aims and objectives • curriculum • language • metaphors • myths and fables • sagas and legends • organisational structures • traditions	• crests • mottoes • icons • uniforms • resources • facilities and equipment • artifacts and memorabilia	• rituals •ceremonies • teaching and learning • assessment and evaluation • operational procedures • rules and regulations • rewards and sanctions • psychological and social support structures • parent and community interaction patterns

Millikan's conceptual framework is a dynamic rather than static one. Firstly, the seemingly strict demarcation between the intangible foundations and the tangible expressions of culture is, in reality, illusory: he insists that there is an absence of strict boundaries between the categories and the various elements should be understood as interactive.[35] Secondly, he acknowledges and affirms the influential interchange that occurs between the school and the wider community.[36] Thirdly, he views a school's culture as the gestalt of all the elements involved in his description.[37] Fourthly, "culture is capable of modification and transformation through the intentional manipulation of emphases and weightings of the various interacting elements."[38]

Millikan's conceptual framework provides a useful tool for moving towards an understanding of school culture. Because of its general nature it is applicable in a variety of situations. It balances the tension between the qualitative and the quantitative by identifying and examining both the intangible and the tangible elements that contribute towards the building and maintenance of culture. His focus upon philosophy, values and ideology and how these are given actual expression is refreshing, as is his dynamic understanding of the interaction between these elements. Such an understanding avoids a purely positivist and deterministic approach in which the school and the school community has little or no control and power over its own future.

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[35] Cf. Millikan, 40.
[36] Cf. Millikan, 40.
[37] Cf. Millikan, 54.
[38] Millikan, 54.

Religious Dimension and Catholic School Culture

Marcellin Flynn acknowledges that he draws heavily upon Millikan's work.[39] Flynn develops Millikan's conceptual framework for use in his study of the culture of Catholic schools by giving particular emphasis to the religious dimension as the key and unique characteristic of Catholic schools. Such development and adaptation is consistent with Millikan's model and even envisaged by Millikan. In speaking of the role of ideology as a particular expression of a more generalized philosophy Millikan suggests that

> schools with specific religious affiliations give direct weighting to the importance of ideology. Most independent (non-government) and denominational schools fall into this category.[40]

Flynn adapts Millikan's framework, but not before clarifying his own definition of culture, which he refers to as:

> the core beliefs, values, traditions, symbols and patterns of behavior which provide meaning for the school community and which help shape the life of students, teachers and parents. Culture in the daily life of the school provides stability, fosters certainty, encourages predictability and creates meaning. In short, culture is the "way we do things around here." It is the way of being human in a particular school situation.[41]

Flynn's study considers the culture of Catholic schools in terms of four dimensions:

- The Core Beliefs and Values of Catholic Schools: Their Creation Story or Soul (what the school stands for)
- The Expressive Symbols of Catholic Schools: Their Models (visible expressions of what the school is about)
- Processes and Traditions of Catholic Schools: Their Stories and Myths (what the school is aiming at)
- Outcomes and Patterns of Relationships: Their Rituals and Way of Life (how things are done around here)

These four dimensions are distinct, but they are not separate. As Flynn describes them, they operate in a highly interactive and dynamic fashion. They form the basis of the culture of Catholic schools.

While Millikan never intended to examine the spiritual and religious dimension of school culture, he did allow for its existence and the role that it

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[39] Cf. Marcellin Flynn, *The Culture of Catholic Schools* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1993), 40.

[40] Cf. Millikan, 45.

[41] Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 33.

plays in giving a unique culture to a school. By giving particular emphasis to specific aspects of the intangible elements of culture (values, philosophy, ideology) a particular culture would emerge that would distinguish one school from another.[42] Flynn has consciously incorporated the spiritual and religious dimension of human existence into his understanding of school culture.

The key focus of Flynn's studies has been Catholic schools in general. He recognizes that "each school has its own distinctive personality and character" but conducts his work upon the assumption that Catholic "schools as a whole have much in common and form a distinctive school system."[43] His most recent (1993) study has concentrated on the culture of Catholic schools and has resulted in numerous interesting findings and conclusions, a small sample of which are listed below.

1. The culture of Catholic schools has a pervasive effect on students and on the way of life of the schools;[44]

2. Schools with a strong religious culture have a positive influence upon the religious practice of students;[45]

3. The influence of the school principal was found to be the strongest independent effect on the culture of the school;[46]

4. Girls are significantly more positive in their perceptions of school culture, attitudes to religious education and attitudes to the curriculum and are significantly more religious in their approach to life than boys. No significant difference between boys and girls was found in terms of academic achievement;[47]

5. Students in single-sex schools are significantly more religious in their approach to life than students in co-educational schools;[48]

6. Student attitudes to the principal and student morale are the most significant influences upon students' attitudes to religious education;[49]

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[42] Millikan, 54.
[43] Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 398.
[44] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 398.
[45] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 363-364.
[46] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 366.
[47] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 373-376.
[48] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 377, 380-381.
[49] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 386.

7. The influence of teachers has a negative impact upon students' religious beliefs and values, as well as on their moral and social justice values;[50]

8. Practicing Catholic students performed significantly better in public external H.S.C. examinations than non-practicing students;[51]

9. The level of the expectations of parents has significantly increased in the areas of personal development, academic achievement, preparation for employment and social development, but has significantly decreased in the case of religious development;[52]

10. Catholic schools have a religious and academic influence on students which is independent of other influences such as the home, parish or peer group.[53]

Flynn's research clearly highlights some of the achievements attributable to the culture of Catholic schools: their significant educational and religious influence, the manner in which parents and students appreciate Catholic schools and students' respect for the professionalism of their teachers.[54] These are clear indications of the quality of Catholic schools and the manner in which the culture of Catholic schools contributes to that quality.

Challenges facing Catholic Schools

However, Flynn's work also poses some significant challenges for the future development of Catholic schools and the unique culture which distinguishes them: the decline in the religious values and practice of students, the profound changes occurring in students' families, the decline in the religious influence of teachers and the development of relevant religious education courses.[55]

The key challenge posed is the maintenance and development of the religious identity of Catholic education, which is the key to their unique and distinctive culture. According to Flynn's research Catholic schools are achieving many, if not most, of their educational aims. Catholic schools seem to be achieving many of their social goals. They also seem to be achieving some of

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[50] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 406.
[51] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 370-371.
[52] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 402.
[53] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 400, 421.
[54] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 421-425.
[55] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 425-430.

their religious and spiritual objectives. Yet it is precisely in this area that they are most critically challenged.

This same concern is reflected in recent writings in the liberal Catholic British weekly *The Tablet*. In the face of mounting pressure from the Office for Standards in Education to meet government standards and criteria and in the face of public pressure to improve league-table standings, some educational practitioners are calling for a deepening of Gospel values that lie at the heart of Catholic education.

> The challenge facing Catholic schools ... is to make the Gospel credible in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic communities... We must have a culture in our schools which nurtures faith... if our teaching of the Gospel is to be credible to the critical young minds with whom we work each day, we need to establish at the center of school life a culture which seeks to educate the whole person.[56]

> In an educational world which is becoming obsessed by assessments, baselines, standards and tests, there are still some things [including appreciation of prayer, openness to spiritual values, social justice, concern for others and human respect] which can never be measured.[57]

Charism

One aspect of the religious dimension of the culture of many Catholic schools that Flynn does not adequately consider is that of the "charism" of the religious order which founded the school. He has not attempted to examine or explore how the charism of religious orders contributes to the establishment and maintenance of the culture of the school and the quality of the education offered. In various parts of his studies he makes reference to the charism of some religious orders. He, rightly, sees the charism of the congregation associated with the foundation of the school as a subset of the stories, myths and traditions of the school, but gives little attention to the manner in which they influence the school culture.

While it was never Flynn's intention to explore or investigate the founding charism, it seems that to relegate charism to little more than a footnote is to misunderstand the manner in which it operates and how it impacts upon the heart, mind and soul of a school. The dynamic nature of culture and the interactive manner in which the various contributing aspects of culture operate would seem to suggest that the influence of charism will permeate every dimension of the life of the school to the extent that a unique culture will evolve.

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[56] Michael Holman, "Our Mission in the Classroom," *The Tablet* (10 October 1998): 1312–1313.

[57] Pauline Barnes, "God in All Things," *The Tablet* (10 October 1998): 1322–1323.

"Charism", like the "quality" and "culture", is a concept that is somewhat elusive and one that lacks immediate and undisputed precision and clarity. However, charism is usually used to refer to the unique and original character or spirit associated with a particular spiritual tradition.[58] It can be described, in general terms, as "a window on the gospel, a framed vision of people following Jesus that attracts others to do so in a similar way."[59] Charism is a particular gospel orientation with certain evangelical accents and nuances and it can be a source of life, of unity and of dynamic newness.[60] Charism is basic to the identity of a religious institution and is characterized as the enfleshment of a founder's vision in the present day followers.[61]

The English word "charism" has its origins in the Greek word *kharisma* (meaning the free gift of grace), a word which was coined by St. Paul in his letters to the early Christian churches.[62] According to St. Paul, there are a variety of gifts, including healing, teaching, prophecy, miracles and speaking in tongues. These are always freely given by God for the service of the Church and attributable to the work of the Holy Spirit.[63]

The word "charism" was first used in reference to contemporary religious life and the unique spirit of particular religious institutions by Pope Paul VI in his 1971 apostolic exhortation, *Evangelica Testificatio*, on the renewal and adaptation of religious institutes following the Second Vatican Council. Paul VI uses the term in relationship to the original spirit of the founder of a particular religious institute, which is considered a gift of the Holy Spirit, provides a constancy of orientation, implies certain fundamental options and is capable of renewal and adaptation according to the changing circumstances of place and time.[64]

For the purposes of the present discussion, three characteristics of charism will be examined: (i) the role of the founder; (ii) the community dimension of charism; (iii) dynamic and evolutionary nature of charism.

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[58] Cf. *Mutuae Relationes*: Instruction on the Relationship between Bishops and Religious in the Church, Sacred Congregation of Bishops and Sacred Congregation for Religious and Secular Institutes (May 14, 1978), no. 11-12.

[59] Elizabeth McDonough, "Charisms and Religious Life," *Review for Religious* 52.5 (September-October 1993): 648.

[60] Cf. Fintan Sheeran, "Charism as Empowerment to Discern, to Decide, to Act, to Access," *Review for Religious* 47.2 (March-April 1988): 162.

[61] Cf. Jean Marie Renfro, "Religious Charism: Definitions, Rediscovery and Implications," *Review for Religious* 45.4 (July-August 1986): 520-530.

[62] Cf. Robert Koch, "Charisma," in *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, edited by Johannes B. Bauer. 2 ed. (London: Sheed and Ward, 1976), 96-97.

[63] Cf. *1Cor* 12:1-11.

[64] Cf. Pope Paul VI, "Evangelica Testificatio," Apostolic Exhortation on the Renewal of Religious Life, 29 June 1971, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery, 1988 rev. ed. Vatican Collection, 1 (Dublin: Dominican Publication, 1987), 685-686, no. 11-12.

Considerations of charism often give great emphasis to what has been seen as the role and vision of the founder. This is consistent with the sociological perspective of charism advocated by Max Weber, who describes *charisma* as

> a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers and qualities. These are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual is treated as a leader.[65]

The life and work of the founder of religious institutes is usually an initial reference point for the understanding of a particular charism. It is here that we discover those aspects of the gospel that were especially attractive to the founder; it is here that we sense what ignited the flame of faith in the heart of the founder; and it is here that we discern the motivating values that gave direction, meaning and purpose to their life's work. To discover and comprehend these things it is important to understand the social and cultural setting in which the founder lived and worked. In this way it is possible to distinguish between why particular founders did what they did and how they did it.[66]

The story of the founder forms part of the tradition, heritage and history of the religious institute or institution. This story becomes part of the narrative structure of the organization and is "instinctual and unconscious even more than it is deliberate and conscious."[67] It is from this story that patterns of life form, structures emerge and customs, rituals and symbols are developed. It is the telling and re-telling of these stories that re-enforces the values which underlie the founder's vision and informs the community which seeks to live out that vision in the present day reality. However, charism cannot simply or simplistically be identified with the leader or with the originating story, because no one can be a leader alone and the story is dead unless people receive it and respond to it.

Thus, the social and communal nature of charism begins to emerge. While the role, vision, mission and spirit of the founder is cardinal to understanding charism, it is insufficient. Following the work of Peter Worsley, Bernard Lee argues that "no one is charismatic alone" and that "the followers are as constitutive of the event called charism as is the leader called charismatic."[68] Lee goes on to explain:

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[65] Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (New York: Free Press, 1947), 358-359.

[66] Cf. Renfro, "Religious Charism," 526.

[67] James Flynn, "Sustaining the Founding Spirit: Institutional Identity and Mission," *Review for Religious* 50.1 (January-February 1991): 126.

[68] Bernard J. Lee, "A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism," *Review for Religious* 48.1 (January-February 1989): 130.

> To be charismatic, a person's gifts must be socially acknowledged. Charisma, therefore, sociologically viewed, is a social relationship, not an attribute of individual personality or a mystical quality.[69]

Charism is, of its very nature, community oriented. The story of the great founders clearly shows that they gather followers around them and form community, thus providing a means of giving concrete expression to individual and corporate values and aspirations. Thus, the community provides support for the work of the mission and is a mechanism for the expression, continuation and perpetuation of the charism and its specific and unique vision and mission. Renfro argues that this is one of the key attributes of charism.

> The charism of a religious community is that gift or combination of gifts which God the Holy Spirit gave to the founding person so that the community might come into existence.[70]

This statement needs to be interpreted in terms of a social and relational understanding of charism because charism only becomes such a vital force if it is perceived, invested with meaning and acted upon by significant others.[71]

Charism is given life and enfleshed by the community which seeks to live out the original vision in the present time. It is the charism that gives the community its identity, provides it with its own wholeness and gives it its own unique meaning and purpose.[72] From a functional perspective, charism allows the community to make decisions and choices which are faithful expressions of the charism itself. It also allows the community to act corporately "with a level of shared perception and vision, of shared aspiration and intent, without which corporate choice and action are impossible."[73] Furthermore, charism provides the criteria by which the community is able to assess its decisions and choices, validate its orientations and evaluate its actions.[74] Thus, charism and community are integrally related not only in their origins but also in continued existence.

As has been discussed, charism is profoundly social and communitarian in its nature and orientation. It is also, in its origins, radically historicised, that is, belonging to a particular place and time and intimately and integrally associated with a specific set of social and cultural circumstances—all this forms part of the "story" at the heart of the charism. However, some of the values and ideals associated with the charism, some of the insights into the gospel captured by the charism and some of the unique means of responding transcend the time, place, culture and social circumstances of the original

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[69] Lee, "A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism," 130.
[70] Renfro, "Religious Charism," 527.
[71] Cf. Lee, "A Socio-Historical Theology of Charism," 130.
[72] Cf. Renfro, "Religious Charism," 528.
[73] Sheeran, "Charism as Empowerment," 168.
[74] Cf. Sheeran, "Charism as Empowerment," 169.

founding moment. Indeed, in this sense the charism itself "is not limited by time or culture."[75]

However, charism is not "a-cultural" or "a-historical". Charism can only be given expression in the midst of history, culture, and geography. The charism is non-existent if it is not incarnated in and given expression by the present-day followers of the founder, that is the community which lives and perpetuates the charism. These present-day circumstances will undoubtedly be different from that of the founder, and the community will necessarily enter into a dialogue that includes both the tradition and story of the charism and the immediate social circumstances. Hence, the charism, if it is to remain alive and relevant, will inevitably evolve.

Thus, the dynamic and evolutionary nature of charism becomes evident. Such an understanding of charism is implied by Paul VI, who argued that "the call of God renews itself and expresses itself in different ways according to the changing circumstances of time and place."[76] He distinguished between the external forms of charism and its driving force. Furthermore, he acknowledged that change and adaptation was inevitable and necessary:

> The interior impulse which is the response to God's call stirs up in the depth of one's being certain fundamental options. Fidelity to the exigencies of these fundamental options is the touchstone of authenticity in religious life. Let us not forget that every human institution is prone to become set in its ways and is threatened with formalism. It is continually necessary to revitalize external forms with this interior driving force, without which these external forms would very quickly become an excessive burden.[77]

Faithfulness to the charism means evaluating the charism in the light of "the signs of the times" and envisaging new and creative means of living the charism.[78] This implies that the community will undertake a process of searching and discernment to discover what they must do and be in this particular set of circumstances. This dialogue between the charismatic story and present reality will enable the community to determine its way of life and of pastoral action in response to the world in which it finds itself and to do this with a certain perspective, a certain orientation and point of view, a particular spirit.

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[75] Renfro, "Religious Charism," 528.

[76] Paul VI, "Evangelica Testificatio," 686, no. 12.

[77] Paul VI, "Evangelica Testificatio," 686, no. 12.

[78] The phrase "signs of the times" is found in Mt 16:3. This Gospel phrase became a favorite of Pope John XXIII in convoking Vatican II, and its use in the conciliar documents set the tone for the renewal that followed. See: "Gaudium et Spes," Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II, December 7, 1965, translated by Ambrose McNicholl, OP, in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, edited by Austin Flannery. 1988 rev. ed. Vatican Collection 1 (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1987), 904, no. 4.

The dynamic and evolutionary nature of charism is further illustrated by the manner in which Sheeran and Hilton refer to charism as future oriented. "Charism is by it very nature future oriented... it is an orientation filled with purpose and with the power to achieve its purpose."[79] The values, beliefs and expectations that constitute the elements of the story at the heart of a charism are drawn from the past, they inform the present and they enlighten the future. "The story is the unfolding of a charism, lived out in the history of a community and made real in time and place... today we tell the story of yesterday and make the story for tomorrow."[80]

It is clear that the understanding of charism presented does, as Flynn suggested, form part of the myths, traditions and stories that contribute to the culture of a school having its origins in a particular religious heritage. It is also abundantly clear that the very nature of a charism which is alive and active within a school community is such that it will inform every aspect of the culture of that school. This dynamic and interactive process may be observed, by way of example, in the manner in which the Salesian charism permeates the Salesian school and creates a unique culture.

While the Salesian educational tradition shares with all Catholic schools those traditions, stories and myths that are the common inheritance of the whole Church, it also has its own unique set of traditions, stories and myths. First and foremost amongst all these is the life and work of St. John Bosco.

Experience of the Founder: Don Bosco

John Melchior Bosco was born to a poor rural family in northern Italy in 1815. Despite the death of his father at the age of two, dire poverty and severe family dysfunction, Bosco demonstrated, from his earliest years, great intelligence and academic ability, formidable athletic prowess, incredible social skills and a deep and active faith.

At the age of nine, he had a dream, which influenced and gave great meaning to the rest of his life. In the dream Bosco saw himself amidst a great throng of young people whom he was charged to care for by means of goodness, kindness and love, rather than by means of force and compulsion.

Despite Bosco being forced to leave home at the age of twelve because of difficulties in his relationship with his older brother, he persevered with his studies. To pay for his schooling, he took on part-time jobs and learned skills including carpentry, tailoring and cobbling. He entered the seminary and was ordained a priest on June 5, 1841.

After ordination, while he was enrolled in a course of Pastoral Studies, Bosco visited the jails, hospitals, streets and market places of Turin. Here he came into contact with the homeless, the unemployed and the poor who were

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[79] Sheeran, "Charism as Empowerment," 164.

[80] Mark Hilton, "Sharing the Spirit: Transmission of Charism by Religious Congregations" (Ed.D. diss., University of Melbourne, 1997), 18.

the product of the turbulent political, social and economic circumstances of the middle decades of nineteenth century on the Italian peninsula.

Bosco began gathering the "poor and abandoned" boys who roamed the streets with nothing to do. He organized games and activities for them, gave them religious instruction and held religious services for them. In order to meet their needs more adequately he gradually expanded his work—in spite of criticism from church and civil authorities—to provide them with food, clothing, accommodation and education.

In order to continue and expand his work, he gathered interested people (including some of his older students) into a community under the patronage of St. Francis de Sales, thus beginning the Salesian Society. He later co-founded an institute of women, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, to do similar work for girls.

Attending to the material, pastoral and spiritual welfare of the rapidly expanding network of communities under his care and the continual need to secure the financial resources to fund and support his humanitarian, charitable and religious activities meant that his time was increasingly occupied with meetings, travel and writing. In response to the need for educational resources for his students Bosco authored numerous texts, established his own printing press and edited several popular magazines. He wrote books, pamphlets and biographies in order to provide his students and his growing public audience with written materials appropriate for their human and spiritual formation.

Bosco was also called upon to undertake numerous other activities. He acted as a mediator between the Papacy and civil authorities throughout Italy, built a series of churches, schools and oratories, commissioned a series of missionary expeditions to South America and founded two organizations of lay people to assist him in his work.

The name "Don Bosco" became extraordinarily well known throughout Europe—especially Italy, Spain and France—as a result of his prolific activity in such a wide range of civil and ecclesial projects. The nature of his work for young people and the novel, if not revolutionary, approach that he adopted captured the imagination of people from every stratum of society. His death, in 1888, saw hundreds of thousands line the streets of Turin to pay their last respects to "Don Bosco", the father and teacher of youth.

It is this story that continues to capture the imagination of the community of the Salesian school and shapes so much of its life. This is the "creation myth" that helps to establish the philosophical and pragmatic parameters for the functioning of Salesian education and that informs everyday activities such as prayers, games and interpersonal relations between staff and students. This is the foundation of a tradition that places great emphasis on "reason, religion and loving-kindness", group activities, religious celebrations and service of the poor. This story serves as the vehicle for the transmission of a set of beliefs, values, customs and activities that have become integral to education within the Salesian tradition.

All Catholic schools share, to some extent, the same basic core beliefs and values. There exists a common philosophical and theological foundation for and in all Catholic schools. However, the manner in which these beliefs and values are mediated will be different and one of the shaping influences will be the nature of the religious charism that permeates the school.

One of the beliefs that is fundamental to the Catholic education is the importance of ensuring that the Catholic school is imbued with Gospel values. Salesian education shares this fundamental belief. However, because of its history and tradition and because of certain aspects of its founding story, Salesian schools are likely to emphasize particular gospel values.

> The Salesian spirit finds its model and source in the very heart of Christ, apostle of the Father. Reading the Gospel we become more aware of certain aspects of the figure of the Lord: gratitude to the Father for the gift of a divine vocation offered to all men; predilection for the little ones and the poor; zeal in preaching, healing and saving because of the Kingdom; the preoccupation of the Good Shepherd who wins hearts by gentleness and self-giving; the desire to gather his disciples into the unity of brotherly communion.[81]

This statement reflects a Salesian understanding of some core Gospel values including the preferential option for the poor, the preferential option for the young, the importance of community and the spiritual destiny of humanity.

Option for the Young, especially the Poorer Ones

The Church's "option for the poor" is well known, is firmly Gospel-based, is a consistent element of the Church's tradition and has been expressed in word and action throughout the history of the Church—this despite many obvious examples to the contrary. The expression has gained greater currency in more recent times in the light of the writings of the Catholic Bishops of Latin America.[82]

The Church has also clearly stated it's "preferential option for the young."[83] Unfortunately, this pastoral option is not as prominently or popularly known and has even been described as the "forgotten option." In reflection on certain aspects of liberation theology, the Holy See in 1984 noted: "We should recall that the preferential option described at Puebla is twofold:

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[81] *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales* (Roma: Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco, 1984), 21-22, no. 11.

[82] See: CELAM, "Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future: Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate, Puebla de Los Angeles, January 28 - February 13, 1979," in *Puebla and Beyond*, edited by John Eagleson, and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1979), nos. 1134-1165.

[83] Cf. "Evangelization in Latin America's Present and Future," no. 1131, 1166-1205.

for the poor and for the young. It is significant that the option for the young has in general been passed over in total silence."[84]

The pastoral option for the young is central to the Salesian tradition and it forms a prominent aspect of the Salesian collective and individual consciousness: "it is enough that you are young that I should love you very much."[85] This emphasis is then given concrete expression through the education of the young where education is understood in its broadest sense and is not simply restricted to schooling.

Community is central to any understanding of Christian faith and Church. The faith of the first Christians was expressed in communal life and worship.[86] Contemporary ecclesiology, building upon the Second Vatican Council's understanding of Church as "The People of God," gives special emphasis to the Church as community.[87] Community is fundamental to the Church's understanding of the Catholic schools and is one of the aspects which contributes to their special character.[88] Drawn together by constant reference to the Gospel and frequent encounter with Christ, the Catholic school should be a community with "an atmosphere permeated with the Gospel spirit of freedom and love."[89] Indeed, the social nature of humanity and education as a social process make the establishment of community a basic requirement:

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[84] Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith. *Instruction on Certain Aspects of Liberation Theology* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1984), ch. VI.6.

[85] Giovanni Bosco, *Il Giovane Provveduto per la pratica de' suoi doveri negli Esercizi di Cristiana Pietà per la Recita dell'Uffizio della Beata Vergine e de' principali Vespri dell'anno, coll'aggiunta di una Scelta di Laudi Sacre ecc.* (Torino: Paravia, 1847/Anastatic version: *Opere Edite*, vol. II. Roma: LAS, 1976), 7/187, cited in *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, 23, no. 14.

[86] See: *Acts of the Apostles* 2:42-27 and 4:32-35.

[87] The term "people of God" is used in "Lumen Gentium," Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, Vatican II, 21 November 1964, translated by Colman O'Neill, in *Vatican Council II: The conciliar and post conciliar documents*, edited by Austin Flannery. 1988 Revised ed. Vatican Collection, 1 (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Co., 1987), 350-426, nos. 9-17. For an understanding of how the use of this image has developed, see: Avery Dulles, *A Church to Believe In: Discipleship and the Dynamics of Freedom* (New York: Crossroad, 1982); Roger Haight, *An Alternative Vision: An Interpretation of Liberation Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1985); Denis Edwards, *Called to be Church in Australia: An Approach to the Renewal of Local Churches* (Sydney: St. Paul Publications, 1987). For use of this image in the Magisterium, see: Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* addressed by the Supreme Pontiff John Paul II to his venerable brothers in the Episcopate, the priests, the religious families, the sons and daughters of the church, and to all men and women of good will at the beginning of his papal ministry, March 4, 1979; translated from the Latin (London: Catholic Truth Society, 1979), especially nos. 1, 3, 11, 18-21, 22.

[88] Cf. Sacred Congregation for Christian Education, *The Catholic School* (Homebush: St. Paul Publications, 1977), no. 53.

[89] Sacred Congregation for Christian Education, *The Catholic School*, no. 55.

> The community aspect of the Catholic school is necessary because of the nature of man and the nature of the educational process which is common to every school.[90]

This emphasis on community as a constitutive dimension of the Catholic school is given particular expression in the Salesian tradition as the "family spirit" of which Bosco commonly spoke as an essential feature of his educational thought.[91] In his articulation of how this sense of family spirit might be interpreted in the contemporary setting, Patrick Laws points out that the term should be in a critical and discriminating sense since the overtones of nineteenth century, patriarchal, village inspired structures are obviously present. However, he suggests the term, as a lived reality, will have some permanent distinguishing features including friendly personal relationships, a wide variety of human contacts, group activity, the collaboration and leadership of the young, pastoral leadership and a strong sense of joy and celebration.[92] Furthermore, he suggests that the school community will be a worshipping and reconciling community, with a positive commitment to justice as a result of the recognition of the essential dignity of all before God.[93]

We again see here that the relationship between the various aspects that contribute towards school culture is dynamic and interactive. Beliefs about the human person give rise to values, which become the basis of behavior and action. Basic beliefs and values are also given concrete expression in the traditions, expressive symbols and patterns of behavior in the life of the school. The fundamental ideal of community becomes a concrete reality through a complex web of lived values, presumed ways of doing things, daily rituals and ritual celebrations, which in turn contribute to the building of community.

It is possible to discern here what Bryk, Lee and Holland define as the three critical components of the communally organized school: (i) set of shared values; (ii) a set of shared activities; and (iii) a distinctive set of social relations.[94] According to Bryk et al., such a community orientation is evident in the "pervasive warmth and caring that characterized the thousands of routine social interactions in each school day."[95] This accounts for Catholic schools having lower student dropout rates and higher rates of student engagement and teacher commitment.[96]

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[90] Sacred Congregation for Christian Education, *The Catholic School*, no. 54.

[91] Cf. Patrick Laws, *Walking with the Young: the Salesian Way of Educating* (Manila: Salesiana Publishers, 1993), 17.

[92] Cf. Laws, 17-19.

[93] Cf. Laws, 21.

[94] Cf. Bryk, Lee and Holland, 277-278.

[95] Bryk, Lee and Holland, 275.

[96] Cf. Bryk, Lee and Holland, 273-276.

Founding Beliefs and Values Education

Earlier I attempted to demonstrate how the Salesian charism influences the expression of some of the key Catholic beliefs about education. It is clear that this specifically Salesian expression of gospel values reflects the Church's understanding. It is equally clear that they also reflect the founding story of the Salesian tradition (the life of Don Bosco and the experience of the Turin Oratory), the on-going development and evolution of that tradition and critical reflection upon that experience. Thus, the Salesian educational tradition mediates these key beliefs and values via a specific spirituality and a particular view of the world, both of which arise from a unique set of historical experiences.

In Flynn's model of school culture, the school community must not only hold certain core beliefs and values in common, but must also express and celebrate these in the form of expressive symbols.

> Such symbols point to a world of meaning and reality beyond themselves and are visible expressions of what the school stands for.[97]

Such expressive symbols include religious symbols and images, school crests, badges and mottoes, school ceremonies, school publications and school uniforms.

Like other schools, Salesian schools give particular expression to their identity and the beliefs and values upon which this identity is founded through the use of such expressive symbols. Images of Don Bosco, in a multitude of forms, abound in Salesian schools. Prayers are often concluded with specific invocations (such as Mary Help of Christians, pray for us or St. John Bosco, pray for us), which reflect key aspects of the Salesian tradition and spirituality.

Likewise, the primary liturgical celebrations of the whole school community often have a focus that is uniquely Salesian, for example feast days such as Mary Help of Christians, St. John Bosco and St. Dominic Savio. Liturgical celebrations attempt to have a youthful orientation reflecting a particularly Salesian understanding of prayer as joyful and creative, simple and profound, lending itself to community participation, drawing from life experience and flowing back into it.[98]

Flynn maintains that the core beliefs, values, traditions and symbols of the school generate patterns of behavior—that is, rituals and ways of life that become part of "the way things are done around here" for staff, students and parents.[99] Examples of this include everything from the manner in which parents collect students from school at the end of the day, the organization of the timetable, patterns of discipline, the structure of school assemblies and the way in which students line up for the tuck-shop.

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[97] Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 43.
[98] Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, 73, no. 86.
[99] Cf. Flynn, *Culture of Catholic Schools*, 49.

"Presence"

Salesian schools, as a result of their preferential option for the young and the desire for staff to be signs and bearers of the love of God[100] adopt a specific attitude towards interactions between staff and students. This generates some particular practices which will be adapted according to the time, place and circumstances of the interaction as well as the personalities the interacting staff and students. The term "presence" has been coined to capture the key elements of this uniquely Salesian approach. The following description is but one example of how this approach captures many of the beliefs and values at the heart of the Salesian tradition and how these might be translated into "the way we do things around here."

"Presence" is central element of the Salesian Spirit. It was close to the heart of Don Bosco's own practice. He understood clearly and instinctively that educators—especially Salesian educators—were called to be signs and bearers of God's love and presence to their students.

In the Salesian tradition "presence" is being with the young people entrusted to our care—being physically and actively among them. It is an active and dynamic way of "being"—of being with and for the young; of having their best interests and welfare at heart. It implies establishing relationships with them which are based on mutual respect, equality and co-operation, rather than fear and superiority.

Presence suggests an openness to others that is evident in a sharing of lives. Presence has to do with loving what young people love so that they can learn to love what we love. It is about engaging them, interacting with them—speaking and listening, playing and praying, laughing and crying, encouraging and challenging, correcting, and guiding. It is in our everyday encounters with young people, and in sharing our lives and our selves that we communicate the presence of God's life-giving love to our young people.

"Presence" has a rich and deep scriptural and theological basis. The presence of God is manifest in power and creativity in the act of creation—bringing order out of chaos. God manifests his presence to Abraham, with promises of blessings and prosperity. Moses encounters God's presence in the burning bush as one who listens to the cries of his people and acts on their behalf. It is here that the name of God is revealed: "Yahweh", the one who is—the one whose presence "is"—whose presence is with and amongst the people, whose presence is life-giving. The presence of Yahweh is with the Israelites in the form of cloud and fire as they escape the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land. The Temple of Jerusalem is the sanctuary of the abiding presence of Yahweh.

When the presence of God takes on human form in the person of Jesus, he is announced as "Emmanuel"—God with us. In Jesus, God assumes hu-

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[100] Cf. *Constitutions of the Society of Saint Francis de Sales*, 17, no. 4.

manity to join us and to be with us and to share our humanity—in all its ambiguity. In the Incarnation, God enters the human story and so entwines the sacred and the divine into one. Jesus reveals God's love, justice and mercy. Jesus makes God present in history. Before his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus promises that his presence will be with those who gather in his name; he gave us the Eucharist as a remembrance of his presence and promises to send the Holy Spirit so that his presence might be with us always until the end of time.

The Tradition of the Church echoes the Biblical understanding of presence, proclaiming that Christ is present in the gathering of the faithful, the Body of Christ; in the Word of God, the Scriptures; in the priestly minister acting in the person of Christ; and in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist as the Body and Blood of Christ. For Don Bosco the Eucharist was the abiding sign of presence of Christ in our midst. For this reason the Eucharist was central to Don Bosco's whole educational approach because it was a communal celebration of the loving presence of God.

Furthermore, the tradition of the Church teaches that the presence of God is revealed in the awe inspiring beauty of creation and in human relationships and encounters—"whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me." We have only to examine Jesus' own encounters with people to discover this. Thus, the Church understands Jesus as the sacrament of God and itself as is the sacrament of Jesus—Jesus is the ultimate expression of God's presence in the world and the Church is a means of presence of Christ in the world.

Don Bosco envisaged Salesian educators as people who are with and for the young, sharing the lives of the young and making the reality of Christ's presence in the world a part of the experience of their young people. This is one way of personalizing Vatican II's understanding of the role of the Church in the world:

> The joy and hope, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially those who are poor or afflicted in any way, are the joy and hope the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. Nothing that is genuinely human fails to find an echo in their hearts. For theirs is a community composed of people, of people who, united Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit, press onwards towards the Kingdom of the Father and are bearers of a message of salvation intended for all people. That is why Christians cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.[101]

For educators—especially Salesian educators—we respond to our mission of serving the young when we make ourselves present in their midst, sharing the joy and hope, the grief and anguish of their lives in an active and participatory way. It is by engaging in their lives that we have the opportunity of communicating the presence of God, of being signs and bearers of Gods life and love.

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[101] "Gaudium et Spes," Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, Vatican II, December 7, 1965, 903-904, no. 1.

Furthermore, by being present with the young we also have the opportunity of discovering the presence of God, for God is active in their lives also. Thus, a spirituality of presence—so evident in the Eucharist—is a way of living out our mission as Christian educators, and an avenue for personal growth. If we are open to the presence of God in the lives of the young we can grow in wholeness and holiness.

Thus, presence suggests a way of life and of being—a spirituality. It is also given practical expression, for example, in the manner in which staff undertake what is usually called in most schools "yard supervision". In Salesian schools this responsibility is called "assistance" and staff members are expected to undertake this task as "presence" rather than as supervision. Hence, staff interact freely and spontaneously with students, facilitate games and activities, and join discussions and games. While supervision is included as part of the responsibility, it is more a matter of being present to forestall and prevent problems, rather than react to them post factum. Other practices manifesting an attitude of "presence" include arriving at the classroom early if possible, joining students for prayer, providing extra-curricular opportunities.

Conclusion

The culture of a school is an important and necessary element of "quality" within an education or school setting. Culture is a dynamic, interactive and relational reality that contributes certainty, security, meaning and purpose to the educational process. In schools founded by religious organizations, the religious charism of the institute will profoundly influence the culture of the school and assist in the establishment of a unique identity. The key beliefs and values underpinning the culture of such schools will be mediated via the world view of the religious charism.

Just as one of the primary challenges faced by Catholic schools is the establishment, development and maintenance of their specifically Catholic and religious identity, so one of the key challenges facing religious schools is the issue of maintaining and developing their charism. It is in this way that the values which contribute towards quality education in Catholic schools can be preserved and expressed.